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MEMORIAL OF JAMES CLARKE WELLING

At a meeting, October 1, 1894, of the Board of Managers of the Columbia Historical Society, on motion of Mr Marcus Baker, Messrs Hagner, Hubbard, and Spofford were appointed a committee to draft and present at the next meeting resolutions respecting the death of Dr JAMES C. WELLING. At the meeting held December 3, 1894, the chairman of the committee, Justice A. B. Hagner, presented and read the following minute and resolutions, which were unanimously adopted :

The members of the Columbia Historical Society desire to inscribe on its minutes a lasting testimonial of the sensibility with which they have learned of the death of JAMES CLARKE WELLING, LL. D., one of the active promoters and founders and a prominent official of the Society. This afflictive event occurred at Dr Welling's summer home, at Hartford, Connecticut, on the morning of September 4, 1894.

At one of the last meetings of the Society preceding the summer vacation our friend was with us, as cheerful and vivacious as usual, and he participated in our proceedings with his accustomed intelligence and interest. Although recently his health had become somewhat impaired, there was nothing then in his appearance giving indication of impending illness, and certainly nothing to warn us that an inexorable decree, from which there is no appeal, had already assigned to his name the primacy in our necrology.

Alas! that his honored name shall no more appear in our roster of membership, except as clouded by the sorrowful asterisk that reminds us that on this earth we shall see his face no more!

In reviewing the record of his well-spent life there is no need to borrow or to heighten the language of eulogy. A

faithful statement of the incidents of his career, without embellishment or exaggeration, will present the history of a man who, during a life prolonged beyond the ordinary limit of the Psalmist, was deservedly reckoned among the most useful and gifted of our citizens.

James Clarke Welling was born in New Jersey in 1825 and graduated at Princeton in 1844 with a grade that placed him near the top of a numerous class, many of whose members became distinguished in the professional, political, and literary history of the country. Selecting the law as a profession, he applied himself at once diligently to its study; but there happened in his case that which seems almost to be the rule rather than the exception, so frequently do we seem to be the creatures of chance in the final adoption of a career. He soon abandoned the practice of the law (if he ever began it), and passed his life in association with two very different occupations—the avocation of a teacher and the career of a journalist. That his legal studies aided in his success in each of these employments is undoubted, for if Mr Justice Blackstone went too far in declaring that a knowledge of the law is almost an essential part of a liberal and polite education, he is certainly correct in pronouncing it a most proper accomplishment for every scholar.

His first employment as a teacher was as tutor in a distinguished family in Virginia, where social associations were formed by him of a most interesting personal character.

His first experience in journalism was in connection with prominent newspapers in New York city. The beauty and correctness of style and the vigor and force of reasoning displayed in articles which came to be recognized as his productions, made for him a favorable reputation in the world of journalism and led to an editorial connection with the *National Intelligencer*, which at that day was still a power throughout the country. Conducted from an early day by Messrs Gales and Seaton, first as a Republican and afterward as a Whig newspaper, their editorials on the more important national issues differed greatly from the short

and crisp paragraphs which alone are admissible in the journals of today. They were frequently magnificent essays, embodying with entire correctness (according to the views of the writers) the reliable history of those great controversies, gathered with infinite care from materials often accessible only at the seat of government, explained and illustrated by the contemporaneous experience and knowledge of the editors, acquired during their almost lifelong residence at Washington and their editorship of many of the early archives; and when to these qualifications were added the influence of their high individual character and their extensive personal acquaintance with the actors in these great strifes, and their intimate friendship with many of the most distinguished, it is not wonderful that their writings were received with peculiar respect. Indeed, they were frequently made the text of speeches in high places, and were the sources of inspiration and learning to the newspapers through the country of similar political opinions. When the failing health of Mr Gales rendered it necessary to supply his place, so far as that was possible, Mr Welling took large charge of his particular department, and soon evinced such diligence in research and collaboration and power of statement and logic that, profiting as he doubtless did by the daily counsel of the senior editors while they survived, the *National Intelligencer* under the new management maintained its ancient reputation. Its position during the civil war was of exceptional interest and importance. Firm in its opposition to secession from the beginning, and consistently supporting the cause of the Union, its acknowledged moderation between the extremes of opinion on that side gave special weight to its influence. For this reason it was frequently selected by President Lincoln and by other high officials and prominent persons throughout the country as the medium of important announcements and suggestions to the people. But after the pacification the *Intelligencer*, as it formerly existed, passed away with the new order of things, and Mr Welling's connection with it ceased. It may

well be questioned whether any newspaper ever published contains as vast an amount of wise and valuable editorial work as is collected within the extensive files of the *National Intelligencer*. To the stores within this historic repository, now already prepared for the future historian, Mr Welling furnished a large contribution, and it may confidently be said that nothing of this great collection that came from his facile pen can ever be used to give aid to the traducer or any other enemy of our country bent on a vicious search for materials to belittle or defame it.

Mr Welling was next employed for some time in the office of the clerk of the Court of Claims, until he was chosen to the presidency of Saint John's College, at Annapolis, Maryland, which had been closed during the war. His energy, executive skill, and wise management were soon evinced in the marked increase in the number of students at the venerable institution, and his scholarly ability and aptitude for imparting instruction and communicating his love of learning to the students soon had a marked influence in restoring its ancient reputation. But the same unpatriotic sentiment that had induced the legislature in 1805 by an act, which the highest court of the state afterward declared unconstitutional, to withdraw the annual appropriation intended to be secured by contract in the charter of 1784, caused the abandonment of a temporary appropriation for the college, made when it was reopened, and deprived the institution of funds indispensable for its support. Mr Welling thereupon withdrew and accepted an important professorship at his *alma mater*, and remained at Princeton in that employment until his election to the presidency of Columbian College, at Washington city.

His career here is matter of recent common knowledge. Under its changed name of Columbian University he gathered a greatly enlarged corps of professors in additional branches of instruction, and there was developed such an increase of students that the attendance in each of several of the schools was greatly in excess of the whole number

at any previous period of the history of the institution. It now occupies a recognized position among the prominent educational establishments of the country. His long attention to his arduous duties had made an inroad on his strength, and for this reason and to obtain the opportunity to carry into execution a long-cherished literary design, which was inconsistent with other active occupations, he presented his resignation to the trustees, which was provisionally accepted, to await the choice of a successor. It was under this condition of affairs that he left here, after he had presided at the graduating exercises of the different branches, to enjoy a rest from his labors, which is now perpetual.

Such, is imperfectly, the story of an industrious public life spent in the sight of all men, with great honor to himself and great benefit to the public. But these labors constituted only part of his constant occupation in other directions. His ready pen was seldom unemployed outside of his public duties, and his literary contributions to the reviews and the highest class of newspapers were very frequent, embracing essays and other articles upon historical, philosophical, artistic, and literary topics of the most varied character. He made no pretension to be deeply skilled as an adept in natural philosophy or the kindred sciences, and yet it is very unusual to find a layman so intelligently versed in their general principles as he was, and so well abreast of the march of discovery and invention within their domain. Upon his acquisitions during his early legal studies he had built by constant application a correct knowledge of the principles of natural law and the law of nations, and one of his desires was to take charge of a chair whose function should be the inculcation of the correct principles of international law.

He was particularly well read in history, and especially in that of our own country, and the work he was projecting as the occupation of his time after his release from public engagements was the preparation of a civil history of our

great domestic struggle, as a supplement to its military history, which has thus far almost exclusively occupied the pens of the numerous writers whose works have been devoted only "to the battles of the warriors." Few persons in the country were better equipped with facilities for success in such a work than Mr. Welling. From his vantage ground at the seat of government he had watched the coming storm and seen its premonitory lightnings, and had heard "the thunder of the captains and the shouting."

His position on the *National Intelligencer* had brought him into acquaintance with most of the public men then prominent in Congress, and there was no concealment toward the last on either side of their aspirations and intentions, and scarcely of their plans. He had in his possession numbers of hitherto unpublished writings of great interest, which will go far to confirm or to destroy various favorite theories which have been the subject of much contention since the close of the war. That the theme would have received a painstaking and intelligent treatment in this which would have been his most ambitious work cannot be doubted, and its loss is most regrettable. He was member of a great number of literary and other societies in this District and elsewhere, and his addresses before some of them were among his most graceful efforts. The last occasion on which he appeared in public was at the laying of the cornerstone of the new Corcoran Gallery of Art in May last, when he delivered a most appropriate address, which did justice to the beneficent founder and to the benign institution. Whether the matter were religious or secular, municipal or literary, his interest was readily aroused in a meritorious undertaking and his tongue was ready to speak in its behalf. Always diligently occupied, he was never too busy to have time for his work or for a chat with a friend. It was only by wise methods that so hard-working a man was able to accomplish what he did. No man ever ate less idle bread. His social duties were

important accessories to his public employment, and few men discharged them so fully. He had hosts of acquaintances and "troops" of friends, whom he secured by willingness to serve them and by a politeness and consideration that amounted to a real virtue.

The committee recommend the adoption of these resolutions:

Resolved, That by the death of Dr James C. Welling the Columbia Historical Society has lost one of its most useful and distinguished members, and his associates a valued friend, whose loss we shall ever deplore.

Resolved, That the foregoing minute with these resolutions shall be entered at large on our record, and that a copy of them shall be sent to his widow and daughter, with the assurance of our unfeigned regret at their afflictive bereavement.

Speaking on his own behalf, Justice Hagner added:

It was not my intention to do more at this time than to read the minute and resolutions reported from the committee; but as I recall at this moment the open grave of my friend by which I so recently stood, I find it impossible to refrain from some expression of personal sorrow at the sudden severance of an intimacy extending over so long a period.

I probably knew Dr Welling longer than any one else present. Fifty-one years ago I made his acquaintance; at that time our friendship was formed, and it continued without interruption to the time of his death. "He was my friend, faithful and just to me." I am glad to believe he would have said the same of me.

Our intercourse during his long residence in Washington and in Annapolis was of the most intimate character, and his employments, his plans and hopes, were freely discussed between us. I think I understood his character, his acquirements and his capabilities, and I feel authorized to speak of

them with a reasonable degree of confidence. This city doubtless contains persons more profound as scientists, more learned as historians and publicists, and more accomplished as orators and linguists, but I do not believe a more useful man could be found among us than Dr Welling, within the limitations by which he was surrounded. Guided by the rule of Epictetus, that the man is to be admired who always labors to do his very best according to his opportunities, Dr Welling is justly entitled to be held as one of our most useful citizens; for he was the efficient promoter of many important enterprises, that either would not have been commenced at all, or certainly would not have been performed as well, had his aid been wanting.

If this was not as fully appreciated as it should have been by the general public, it may really have been because of the superabundance of his good works; for the great variety of his useful labors for the general welfare withdrew him, in a measure, from that devotion to a single object which seems to be the price exacted for preëminence. The publication of his various writings, which I hope may not be long delayed, will undoubtedly add to his permanent reputation, as it will to the public store of valuable literature.

I never knew one in whose character and demeanor time made less change. The rather serious college youth, singularly diligent and studious but cheerful and light-hearted, simply ripened into the indefatigable student and active man of business, but he still retained his elasticity of disposition and his youthful feelings and manners. Full of active sympathy with whatever surrounded him, alert in his movements as in his mental activities, his capacity for the enjoyment of friendship appeared to increase with his years.

The wounds from the loss of friends are those that heal slowly. But it is a satisfaction to me to recall that on a visit received from him just before he left Washington for the last time his cheerfulness and charm of manner and conver-

sation were as marked as ever, and to recall "the touch of a vanished hand" that gave no distressing presage it was to be the last.

Hon. A. R. Spofford seconded the resolutions, and said in substance:

In rising to second the resolutions, I should not add a word to the very just, appropriate, and felicitous memorial to our departed colleague, but for one remark which Justice Hagner lately made to me. He said that Dr Welling had not been, perhaps, so widely appreciated in this community as his great merits deserved. If we are to understand appreciation in the sense of great notoriety, this may be true; but if we take it to imply a high estimate and sense of a man's worth on the part of all who knew him, I think that Dr Welling had that in an eminent degree.

As an accomplished scholar, as a successful educator, as a clear and forcible writer in many fields, as an influential editor, as a life-long student and investigator, he achieved wide recognition. While his public life brought him in contact with cultivated men in all the various professions, his ever courteous and genial manners were a passport to the esteem of all. In private intercourse he was a charming companion; his conversation was full of literary, personal, and historical allusion, and enlivened by frequent sallies of humor.

My own intercourse with him, though not intimate, extended over a period of twenty-five years, and brought me acquainted, in some degree, with his methods of study in preparation for treating topics about which he was writing. His frequent visits to the Library, especially after he became a Regent of the Smithsonian Institution and had the privilege of drawing out books, were always with a definite purpose. His investigations were marked by a habit of thorough research characteristic of the careful scholar. He had an instinctive habit of weighing evidence, and the true

critical spirit in dealing with authorities. His style of composition was uniformly that of a man of refined taste, grave and elevated when treating of weighty themes, light and free when dealing with the weapons of ridicule or satire.

He had a marked fitness for historical investigation, and might have become, had his avocations permitted, one of our best writers of history. Both in speech and in writing he was a purist, though without pedantry; and whoever might succumb to the ever-increasing popular slang which corrupts our noble English speech, one was always sure of finding Dr Welling adhering to classic models of style. He spoke and wrote against the attempts of certain "reformers" to destroy our orthography by the phonetic system of spelling the language.

I remember, in almost the last intercourse between us, in June of the present year, when invited to act as one of the judges of merit at Columbian University, his solicitude in pressing upon us the importance of considering in our decision both the strength of the arguments on either side and the manner of their presentation.

In all the meetings which effected the organization of this Historical Society, the wise counsel, large experience, and just judgment of Dr Welling bore a conspicuous part. He took a deep interest in its objects, and you will all concur in the judgment that we have lost in him one of the foremost and most efficient, as well as one of the best equipped of our members. Our grief at his removal from the world is tempered by the assurance that his work here was nobly done, and that he had fulfilled the destined term of a well-rounded and useful life.